



## The Bus on Thursday

*Shirley Barrett*

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## **The Bus on Thursday** Shirley Barrett

Bridget Jones meets The Exorcist in this wickedly funny, dark novel about one woman's post-cancer retreat to a remote Australian town and the horrors awaiting her

It wasn't just the bad breakup that turned Eleanor Mellett's life upside down. It was the cancer. And all the demons that came with it.

One day she felt a bit of a bump when she was scratching her armpit at work. The next thing she knew, her breast was being dissected and removed by an inappropriately attractive doctor, and she was suddenly deluged with cupcakes, judgy support groups, and her mum knitting sweaters.

Luckily, Eleanor discovers Talbingo, a remote little town looking for a primary-school teacher. Their Miss Barker up and vanished in the night, despite being the most caring teacher ever, according to everyone.

Unfortunately, Talbingo is a bit creepy. It's not just the communion-wine-guzzling friar prone to mad rants about how cancer is caused by demons. Or the unstable, overly sensitive kids, always going on about Miss Barker and her amazing sticker system. It's living alone in a remote cabin, with no cell or Internet service, wondering why there are so many locks on the front door and who is knocking on it late at night.

## **The Bus on Thursday Details**

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Author : Shirley Barrett

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## From Reader Review The Bus on Thursday for online ebook

### Brooke - One Woman's Brief Book Reviews says

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\*[www.facebook.com/onewomansbbr](http://www.facebook.com/onewomansbbr)

The Bus on Thursday by Shirley Barrett. (2018).

Eleanor suffered a bad break-up just before she got cancer and the demons that came with it. Eleanor gets a new job as a teenager in a remote mountain hamlet where it all seems peaceful. But where had the previous teacher disappeared to? Why is there so many locks on the door? And why is there a random bus idling out the front late at night?

This book is weird, plain and simple. I didn't mind it at all but I finished it and thought... what did I just read and what did the ending even mean....The back blurb states "Bridget Jones meets the Exorcist in Twin Peaks" and that is actually a pretty accurate summary. The narrative is in the form of a woman, Eleanor, writing unpublished blogs about her days, and it's written exactly how you can imagine she is thinking (a lot of "and I'm like" instead of 'I said'). Eleanor is quite funny at times, and other times you think she must be an absolute nutter losing the plot. Its a strange and quirky book for sure but if you want something different and unusual to read, this one may be for you!

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### Dennis says

I have never read a humor-horror novel that has entertained me as much as ***The Bus on Thursday*** ! Eleanor Mellett lives near Sydney, Australia and is an elementary school teacher. Three months after her break up from her long-term boyfriend, Josh, Eleanor finds a lump by her armpit. After Eleanor gets the bump checked out, she is told that she has breast cancer and it must be removed. Healing from her surgery, Eleanor has found herself in a depressed, lonely, and desperate. After she gets an implant and has been "*recovering*", Eleanor has hiccups in the road in terms of her personal (sex) and professional life. Ready to run away from it all, Eleanor is given the opportunity to work as a primary school teacher in a remote town, outside of the city life that Eleanor has become frustrated with.

Eleanor moves to small town Talbingo, and immediately is drawn the quirks and oddities of the townspeople. The small town's primary school teacher, Miss Barker, has vanished abruptly over night, and the town seems a little off their rocker. *I will not go into this element of the story further, because it's better for you to find out yourself.* Eleanor begins to question her presence in Talbingo after realizing that there's no WiFi, no cell service, and that there's a lot of super questionable people watching her every move.

***The Bus on Thursday*** is being called "*Bridget Jones meets The Exorcist*" and I can totally see why. I would have said "*Bridget Jones meets The Shining*", but you catch my drift. Eleanor is witty, sarcastic, and thoroughly entertaining. In fact, Eleanor is probably one of my most loved protagonists I've ever read about. She's flawed, but owns her mistakes; she's careless, but also doesn't care what people think about her; and she's honest with who she is as a person, while also defensive over her honor when called out by others. This narrator is unreliable, but not dishonest. There's no secret plot loopholes thrown in as a twist or any dramatic turn of events for a quick shock. Eleanor is someone who I would love to be friends with, if she were real.

While the story wasn't necessarily scary, there were some creepy elements to keep the story engaging. I would say that *The Bus on Thursday* is more comedic than scary, but overall a great tale. Readers will be divided on what takes place on the ending, so if you pick this up—LET'S TALK!

Thank you Astoria Bookshop and MCD/Farrar Straus and Giroux for my advanced copy in exchange for an honest review. *The Bus on Thursday* will be released on September 18, 2018.

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### **Barb (Boxermommyreads) says**

I will be honest and admit that this is a hard book for me to review. On one hand, I loved it. The main character, Eleanor, is snarky and sarcastic and since the book is told from first-person blog form, the reader gets plenty of her attitude. On the other hand though, it kind of has an ambiguous tone to it. Is all the crazy stuff really happening or is Eleanor slowly falling off her rocker?

Shortly after being dumped by her boyfriend of four years, Eleanor learns she has breast cancer. After over a year of treatment, she is ready to move on and lands the job of a lifetime as a teacher in the small community of Talbingo. However, things quickly become very weird and before long, Eleanor is having late night sexual encounters with one of her student's brothers and the local friar is trying to exorcise her of the demon which caused her cancer.

As I mentioned, I really liked Eleanor but let's be honest, there's a whole lot of crazy going on in this book. I can see where some might become easily irritated with Eleanor and her foul mouth and moods, but I didn't and I was really cheering her on. There is a small mystery as to what happened to the original teacher Eleanor replaced and I would like to say I now know what happened, but I don't.

I'd say this book is pretty light on horror but deep down, it may have deeper horror roots than originally thought. So am I confusing you? Welcome to the bus. However, even with all this, I really enjoyed the book and had a hard time putting it down.

I do feel if people like their books tied up in neat little packages (even if those packages contain a severed head or are dripping blood), then "The Bus on Thursday" might not be the best book to pick up this Halloween season. But if you are even remotely interested, hop in, strap on your seatbelt and prepare for a bumpy ride.

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### **Mindi says**

This book was provided by the publisher to the Night Worms reading group in exchange for an honest review.

This book! Two of the Night Worms finished it before me, and said to let them know if anyone else finished soon because they NEEDED to talk about it. So I stayed up until about midnight finishing it, and then I needed to talk about it too. So we do. Because that ending! And we finally decided we still don't really quite know what happened.

This is one of the strangest books (in the best way) that I've read in a long time. Eleanor Mellett is a quirky

elementary school teacher who has her life turned upside down with a cancer diagnosis. After Eleanor goes through a number of surgeries and chemotherapy she's left incredibly depressed and lonely. Her boyfriend broke up with her shortly before her diagnosis, and her friends are unsupportive and caught up in their own lives. Feeling alone and desperate Eleanor jumps at the chance to teach at a very small school in the tiny rural town of Talbingo. Once Eleanor moves, things get really weird. And I'll just leave it at that.

The story is told in blog entries by Eleanor that she has no intention of ever posting. The book blurb says that this story is like "Bridget Jones meets The Exorcist" but I don't entirely think that's true. It's been a long time since I read *Bridget Jones's Diary*, but Eleanor makes Bridget seem sensible. There are a number of paranormal and speculative aspects to this novel, but I'm not quite seeing the comparisons to *The Exorcist*. *The Bus on Thursday* is laugh-out-loud funny, disturbing, confusing, and downright weird. And I'm here for all of that. The Night Worms will probably spend quite a bit of time talking about this one. I know I'll be thinking about it for a while too.

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### **Cody | cody'sbookshelf says**

Thanks to FSG Originals for providing the Night Worms free copies of this book, in exchange for honest reviews. This is mine.

*The Bus on Thursday* is a strange and quirky and invigorating read about a scattered young teacher recovering from breast cancer. She gets a job at a small school in the Australian mountains, and she moves to the tiny town where things are strange and darkly funny occurrences happen.

I quite enjoyed this book, more than I expected to. The blog format made for quick, snappy reading and I dug the main character, Eleanor. She was easy to like and I wanted the best for her — isn't that all anyone can ask for in a protagonist?

I must admit I was not a fan of the ending — it was peculiar and unclear. Things don't have to be spelled out for me, but the ending felt vague for the sake of vagueness. In fact, the light supernatural aspects of the story felt shoehorned in overall, and I could have done without them.

*The Bus on Thursday* is out on 9/18!

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### **Emily says**

I want to say this up front - the back of *The Bus on Thursday* describes this book as Bridget Jones meets The Exorcist. Just know going in that it's heavier on the Bridget Jones & lighter on The Exorcist (actually, I didn't really see much of The Exorcist at all). At first, I didn't really consider *The Bus on Thursday* to be a horror novel even though that's what it's being marketed as. After discussion with my review group, I noticed a few more things that I hadn't really thought about before. This book is more layered than I realized upon first read, and although we were left with questions, I've had a lot of fun talking about this book with friends. I think overall it may be a humorous speculative fiction novel, but I'm really interested to see what other people think. I believe there's quite a bit that's open to interpretation.

*The Bus on Thursday* is funny. The narrator gets into ridiculous situations, and handles them with a good

sense of humor. It was easy to like her, and it was easy to become interested in the small town she moves to. A lot of things about her were relatable, and I really enjoyed that aspect of the book.

This book is told in a blogging format, and it's like hearing from your friend. I liked the setup of the book, and I think that it worked really well with the story that was being told. Everything flowed, and it was easy to connect with.

I think the ending may have gone over my head a bit. As I said, after discussing with friends, I feel like I understand some things, but have questions on others. *The Bus on Thursday* is a book that will stick with you & you may find yourself thinking over parts of the plot later on. I would definitely read more from Shirley Barrett, and I'm interested to see what else she comes up with.

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### **Laura says**

Because I could not stop for Death  
He kindly stopped for me  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves -  
And Immortality -

I enjoyed this immensely. I suppose a take on *The Divine Comedy* - in other words Life is a huge fuck-up, and then you die.

There are also strong overtones of Shirley Jackson - and Ms Barrett like her namesake is keen to expose all those hopes, beliefs, ideas, and illusions we have about Life. Doctors, friends, lovers, family can not go with you when the bus arrives. The story of Eleanor Mellet, diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer, is an excision of the layers of meaning we all create in our lives; and strongly reminiscent, at last for me, of the works of Shirley Jackson, and Emily Dickinson.

Yes, there are plenty of layers to this book - if you want to take it as an hilarious romp "Bridget Jones meets *The Exorcist*" - fine, no problem, but I can also see that if you or someone you care for, has experienced cancer - you will understand that a brush with death can be *insanely* scary.

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### **Michael says**

I am going to go out and say it. I have no idea what this book is about that I just read. Is it a rom-com, a crazy country town romp, a missing teacher mystery, a women's journey through madness, over the top religious overtures, wrestling Kangaroos, or maybe something I just can't think of at the moment? This bewildering read is part comedy, part romance, with chilling moments and for some reason, despite bordering on complete farce I could not stop reading.

When Eleanor's life falls apart after being diagnosed with breast cancer and shortly after breaking up with her long-term boyfriend, she decides for a total sea change taking up a teaching job in the tiny town of Talbingo, little does she know what it has in store for her? Firstly she has her work cut out for her trying to win over her students who all adored their former teacher. One of the students, fourteen-year-old Ryan, and his older brother have highly disturbing relationships with Eleanor with the older brother having sex with her

then treating her like garbage. Throw in a local priest who bizarrely believes she gave him cancer and wants to exorcise her, and she inevitably hits the bottle as proceedings go from strange to totally crazy.

At times downright hilarious and at other times just straight out incongruous, I can honestly say I have never read anything like this before and most likely never will again. The questions I have are plenty with is what is happening all in Eleanor's head, is her lover a murderer, is the town completely bat-shit crazy or is this just a reflection of real life that is unpredictable? Who knows but I do know one thing and that this is a story that should be read and is totally nuts.

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## **Marianne says**

The Bus on Thursday is the second novel by prize-winning Australian screenwriter, director and author, Shirley Barrett. It starts with a lump in her armpit, and before Eleanor Mellett knows it, she's had a mastectomy (thank you, George Clooney look-alike), has a fake breast (without nipple, so far), is jobless, fiancé-less and living with mum. She's on hormones for the cancer and anti-depressants (who wouldn't be?!), and has given up the breast cancer support group as a bad joke.

When Miss Barker, the much-loved teacher at Talbingo's one-room school (just 11 students), goes missing, Eleanor steps into the breach. She arrives at the tiny village in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains to be greeted by tearful students and a tearful assistant: this devoted teacher has certainly left Eleanor a high standard to live up to. But is this city girl ready for it? Has she come to terms with her loss? And no mobile reception, no wi-fi, really??

Eleanor will strike most readers as rather immature in both thought and deed: thirty-two going on sixteen for much of the story. While still in the city, she seems to be sane, if rather self-centred and entitled; when she gets to Talbingo, however, things start to get weird, and it's difficult to say whether there's something strange going on in the town, or whether Eleanor's medications are causing her strange dreams/hallucinations, or a bit of both.

This is Eleanor's private blog, written without any intention for it to be shared: the voice, Eleanor admits, is a "horrible snarky" one, all smart-arse funny-angry, so the reader cops a good number of expletives, both in thought and word, and while it may sound natural for this character, some are likely to be offended at her frequent use of the f-bomb (although the blurb gives fair warning).

The story is compelling, sort of like a runaway train about to wreck: you can't look away because there's a morbid fascination for what bizarre thing Eleanor will encounter next and, maybe more pertinently, how she will react to it. It becomes apparent, soon after Eleanor's arrival in Talbingo that this is not going to be any sort of a girl-finds-maturity-through-trauma story. That established, the reader can submit to the blackly funny moments as they occur. Yes, the Bridget Jones meets The Exorcist with a dash of Maria Semple description is probably accurate.

This one is very different from Barret's debut novel, Rush Oh! which is also set in a real town (how do the residents of Talbingo feel about the way they are portrayed?), and the rather abrupt ending may not please all readers, but those who have embraced the tenor of the tale will see it as very fitting. Barrett manages to include demons, dandelion leaves and decoupage, weird theories on cancer, a severed hand, and a teacher who shared more than cupcakes with her students. An original, at times hilarious and weirdly engrossing read.

This unbiased review is from an uncorrected proof copy provided by Allen&Unwin.

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### **Pauline says**

I found it really difficult to get into this book. I did not find it humorous and the bad language put me off. I found the main character unlikeable.

I would like to thank NetGalley and Little Brown Book UK for my e-copy in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Lark Benobi says**

Combine a bright-and-peppy narrative voice, something like Sandra Bullock in "Miss Congeniality," with a stark horrific existential life-threatening and mysterious force, something like what Sandra Bullock experiences in "Bird Box," and there you have it.

Or maybe the stark horrific existential life-threatening and mysterious force here is *cancer*, because, until the book becomes populated by demons about half-way through, the first scenes are all about cancer and its indignities, and the book recalls the jarringly peppy tone of "People Like That Are the Only People Here" by Lorrie Moore.

I loved the zany wildness of this book and the willingness of the author to explore many possible vectors of outcomes, once she had established the horror-story setup of a woman alone in a mysterious and isolated environment. I felt the story went in a few too many directions a little too quickly, though, to be an entirely satisfying read.

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### **Simon says**

Not everyone will love this but I have cackled, gasped and been really moved by this disturbing yet poignant horror with heart. So different from her debut but just as bloody good.

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### **Amanda - Mrs B's Book Reviews says**

\*<https://mrsbbookreviews.wordpress.com>

The Bus on Thursday is a book that takes the cake for the most obscure and confusing book I have read. For this reason it really did get under my skin, baffling me beyond words and thinking. I'm sure it's strange and hypnotic effect will ensure that I won't forget my experience of reading this unusual book in a hurry. Described in the promotional material I received with this review book from the publisher, Allen & Unwin, as 'Bridget Jones meets The Exorcist in Twin Peaks', The Bus on Thursday is quite the genre mash-up.

The Bus on Thursday introduces main cast member Eleanor Mellet. Eleanor's life has recently been thrown into disarray. She is diagnosed with cancer, alongside suffering from the breakup of her long term relationship and her best friend has mutated into a bridezilla, from hell! Unable to nurse her sorrows with her

handsome doctor or family, Eleanor retreats. She takes a teaching post in a remote mountain town, which isn't exactly soul cleansing!

I do not honestly know where to begin with my review for *The Bus on Thursday*, it was such a bizarre and quirky yarn. I kid you not, my head is still swirling! It is hard to categorise this novel, it is a sort coming of age story, a small town romance, a dark comedy, a mystery and a horror book – all in one package! There were times where I really enjoyed this book, especially the writing, it was original and incredibly out there! However, there were moments when I felt out of the loop and I was ultimately baffled by Eleanor and the things that happened to her. Unsettling and bewildering would be the best words to describe *The Bus on Thursday*.

Eleanor Mellet is a colourful lead, I'm still sitting on the fence as to whether or not I liked her. I did feel sorry for her. Eleanor's cancer diagnosis is gut wrenching and I truly felt awful for her. Barrett outlines her cancer journey well and it was almost refreshing to read this very offbeat take on Eleanor's health. Eleanor's life is quite the train wreck, so she made me thankful for my own relatively easy life in comparison.

Eleanor's disappointments, the way others treat her and her embarrassing bungles makes for some interesting, if albeit cringe worthy reading. Barrett's fine character composition of Eleanor is one of the book's highlights. The same can be said for the supporting character set, I found each to be well-rounded, adding extra input to the unfolding narrative.

I don't generally do too well with dark comedy novels, but I gave this one a chance. Sometimes I think I got the dark humour touches, other times I think I was way off the mark. There is a real mixture of humour in this book, from the downright absurd (a dead hand making its presence known) through to genuinely laugh out loud funny moments. I found these moments were mostly featured in the first half of the book.

'I had the mammogram first. I had several mammograms because they couldn't get to it – it was in a really awkward spot. Also apparently I wasn't relaxed enough. My not being relaxed enough while they flattened my breast like a hamburger patty and blasted it with radiation was causing them problems.'

The second half of *The Bus on Thursday* is where things take a turn for the weird, wild and the wacky! The deeper Eleanor becomes involved in her new life in the mountain town of Talbingo, the more absurd things get. The mystery is heightened, and Eleanor's state of mind falters. This is where Eleanor truly becomes an unreliable narrator and we are unsure as to whether or not we can trust her. I know as a reader of this book, it was hard to place my trust in Eleanor, but I felt I had no choice but to surrender to her ramblings, as she is the only narrator of this book. The book is structured around her blog entries, which was an effective mode of telling this story. I know I doubted Eleanor, and I actually got pretty angry with the acts she committed as a teacher (I am a teacher too), it seemed absolutely outrageous!

An area where *The Bus on Thursday* truly succeeds is in the atmosphere and setting. I loved the Australian mountain based locale and the small town setting of Talbingo is depicted well. Barrett allows us to fully experience the feelings that come with living and working in a community where everyone knows each other's business, they are basically living in each other's hip pockets.

'Okay so I get here after this six-hour drive, and the last thirty minutes were like the opening titles in *The Shining* except no snow, just kangaroos and lakes and rivers and mountains and the sun getting low and flaring through the window screen -just so exhilaratingly beautiful.'

You get the picture. Beautiful and evocative descriptions of the small Australian mountain town of Talbingo, where *The Bus on Thursday* is set.

There is omnipresence that goes with this book. It is unsettling and Barrett builds up the suspense in this area well. The symbolism of the shadowy and strange bus that the main character of Eleanor encounters really sent me off kilter. This bus has a prominent part in the final turn of the events, which had me up in arms frankly! I would love to hear what others thought of the open ending!

The Bus on Thursday is a sketchy, cryptic, and offbeat tale from Shirley Barrett. I am intrigued enough by Barrett's writing style to explore her previous work. This one is for readers with an innate sense of curiosity and a willingness to embrace the wild side of life.

\*\*\* 3.5 stars

\*I wish to thank Allen & Unwin for providing me with a free copy of this book for review purposes.

The Bus on Thursday is book #12 of the 2019 Australian Women Writers Challenge

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### **Paromjit says**

If you are looking for a crazy and bonkers read, this piece of weird fiction by Aussie Shirley Barrett might just be for you. There are elements of romance and comic humour, infused with a large dollop of horror, think Bridget Jones crossed with The Shining. Eleanor Mellet has broken up with Josh, her long term boyfriend because he didn't want children, when she discovers she has an aggressive form of breast cancer that throws her life off the rails. Eleanor is snarky, sweary and surly, as her cancer causes her to lose her teaching position. She is beyond upset when she has to undergo a mastectomy that plays havoc with her sense of identity. Her friends are proving to be of little comfort, costing her money as she plays the role of bridesmaid to best friend, Sally, and her self esteem takes a battering when a date with Harry, the hairlip, turns into a disaster. In a narrative consisting of blogs, we follow Eleanor as she takes up a life saver of a working role, teaching in the remote town of Talbingo, population 241, in the foothills of the beautiful Snowy Mountains.

Talbingo seems the perfect spot to recover from cancer, albeit the locals are more than a little offbeat. The priest, Friar Eugene Hernandez, 'the Praying Mantis' seems a trifle insane when he blames Eleanor for her cancer, convinced that her cancer is caused by demons she has inadvertently let into her life. Eleanor is in charge of 11 students of varying ages, replacing their previous teacher, Miss Barker, who is beloved by all in the community. She was a caring, conscientious, sharing and nurturing, the perfect teacher, everything in fact, that Eleanor is not. Miss Barker disappeared one night, leaving Talbingo bewildered and the children feeling unsettled wondering what happened to her. As Eleanor tries discreetly to imbibe her bottles of wine, events take a surreal and hallucinatory turn when it is unclear whether Eleanor is several sandwiches short of a picnic or if Talbingo is just a magnet for horror.

This was certainly a funny, strange, dark and odd read, perfect if you are looking for something different to read. It has a memorable central character in Eleanor, who may or may not be experiencing mental health issues after being afflicted with breast cancer. She may well be the teacher from hell in comparison to the previous incumbent, but in spite of this, Eleanor seems to be following the well trodden and dangerous path of her predecessor, the esteemed Miss Barker. Shirley Barrett has written a wildly entertaining novel that I must admit to thoroughly enjoying, although perhaps it may not be to everyone's taste. Many thanks to Little, Brown for an ARC.

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## **Marchpane says**

### **Sharp, sardonic, black comedy with a horror kick**

Maybe it is because the main character's name is Eleanor, but she reminded me a lot of Kristen Bell's character from *The Good Place* – funny, rude, inappropriate, bitter – but *The Bus on Thursday*'s Eleanor is justified in her causticness. Her life has just been turned upside down by breast cancer.

After losing her boyfriend, job, home, and a breast, to her illness, Eleanor attempts to turn things around by accepting a teaching job in a tiny scenic mountain town. She's to replace the beloved, practically-perfect local teacher who has gone missing in strange circumstances. Things only get weirder from there. Is Eleanor losing it? Is the cancer returning? Is her new boyfriend the Antichrist?

The story is told in first person in the form of unpublished blog entries (so basically, a diary) written by the increasingly unreliable and unhinged Eleanor. It's a strong, distinctive voice which some readers might find irritating, but which I loved for its mordant humour. Barrett really skewers the judgment and self-blame that comes with serious illness too, from Eleanor's friend implying that she got cancer because she 'just always gets wound up over things', to a creepy priest flat-out telling her she 'invited the demon in' and must be exorcised, to her possible-incubus boyfriend saying 'nothing happens to a person that they do not deserve'.

*The Bus on Thursday* is as much about one woman's coping mechanisms as it is about demonic goings-on in a small kooky town. It is sharp, witty, dark, a bit twisted and a lot entertaining.

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